

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 096 819

FL 005 981

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TITLE Job Security and Student Enrollment: A Synonym Drill.
PUB DATE Nov 73
NOTE 10p.
JOURNAL CIT Bulletin of the Illinois Foreign Language Teachers Association; v5 n2 p10-19 Nov 1973

EDRS PRICE MF-\$0.75 HC-\$1.50 PLUS POSTAGE
DESCRIPTORS Career Education; Career Opportunities; Community Attitudes; Culture; Employment Opportunities; Employment Qualifications; Individualized Instruction; *Language Enrollment; Language Instruction; *Language Programs; *Language Teachers; Second Language Learning; Short Courses; Student Attitudes; *Student Enrollment

ABSTRACT

The interrelatedness of job security for language teachers and student enrollment in foreign language courses is discussed. The decline in student interest and enrollment in language programs is traced to several sources including: (1) the "let's-teach-only-the-best-kids" syndrome, (2) the continuity myth, and (3) the "can't-get-away-from-the-text" syndrome. Suggestions for alleviating attrition and for attracting the untouched student population focus on program diversity through the development of minicourses, an increased emphasis on individualized instruction, and the addition of more culture courses to the foreign language program. Teachers are urged to promote career education in order to make students at every level of foreign language instruction aware of careers that either require or that would be enhanced by foreign language skills. The need to increase public awareness of foreign language offerings is stressed, and several activities which would involve the public at large in language programs are described.

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Bulletin of the
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**JOB SECURITY AND STUDENT ENROLLMENT:
A SYNONYM DRILL**

by Robert C. Lafayette
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When I was initially contacted last spring about addressing the Illinois Foreign Language Teachers Association, I must admit that it was with a certain amount of reluctance that I accepted the offer. It was indeed an honor to be invited to return to the Chicago area where my career as a foreign language teacher was born. But on the other hand, I wondered what I might have to say to so many excellent and dedicated foreign language teachers, especially those who had helped shape my career, my former professors at the University of Chicago and my former colleagues at Evanston Township High School. I finally decided that if I displayed some of the talents which they helped develop in me, that would satisfy them and I could then proceed to do what had been requested of me. For my professors at the University of Chicago, I would like to define "étude de style:" "étude de style" means spending the summer on the beach in St. Tropez watching the girls parade in their "sans-a-kini." For my former colleagues at Evanston I would like to repeat that ever popular lunchtime discussion phrase: "Same to you, fella!" Finally, for Florence Steiner I would like to read the following behavioral objective: "given three French sentences containing voiceless bilabials, the student, holding a lighted match in front of his mouth, will read the sentences aloud such that the match is not extinguished. A burnt finger is considered passing."

At first sight the selection of "job security" as the theme of the 1973 annual meeting appears to evoke a certain amount of *insecurity* within the foreign language teaching profession: personal insecurity about the very position which we now hold and professional insecurity about what we are doing in the classroom. Further examination of the "job security" theme, however, reveals not so much insecurity and fear, but rather *recognition* and *courage*. We are

recognizing the fact that we face a serious decline in enrollments at all levels of foreign language instruction and that this decline is due to not only societal factors such as stringent budgets, but also to some of our past curricular practices such as the "let's-teach-only-the-best-kids" syndrome, the continuity myth, and the "can't-get-away-from-the-text" syndrome. Having recognized the problems, the "job security" theme also implies that we have the *courage* to secure both our jobs and the importance of foreign language teaching in American society. I say this with confidence because I know that throughout the entire profession and especially in this audience today, we can find the best-prepared, the most innovative and the most dedicated foreign language teachers this country has ever seen.

For almost all foreign language teachers at all levels of instruction, job security, in my opinion, can only have one synonym: student enrollment. Even the graduate school scholar and researcher, who supervises doctoral candidates, very much depends on student enrollment for his existence. He knows that if elementary and intermediate language enrollment drop, there will be fewer graduate assistants hired, which in turn will endanger the existence of the graduate program and eventually his own personal job security. Teacher trainers such as myself are very much aware that our security ultimately depends on enrollments at the elementary and secondary levels of education. I mention these two instances because the task ahead of us must involve members of the profession at all levels of instruction. Furthermore, we should not depend on the phenomenon called tenure to give us job security because in the face of lack of enrollments, tenure is meaningless. In the event that you question my judgment, ask the 17 tenured faculty members at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater who last summer all received terminal letters because of substantial enrollment drops.

Once we admit that student enrollment is the key to job security, we must now search for terms synonymous with student enrollment. Two come to mind: less attrition and the untouched population. The attrition problem is indeed a familiar one. Between 50 and 60 percent of all students studying foreign languages are in Level One courses. Only about 20 percent of students who begin a foreign language ever reach Level Three while Level Four consists mostly of the few "brains" who probably would have little difficulty learning the language on their own. What is even more disturbing is the fact that more than two-thirds of all secondary school students are never exposed to any foreign language. This means that only about 5 percent of the entire school population is enrolled in Level Three and Level Four foreign language classes. It is no wonder that John Lawson, Superintendent of Schools in Shaker Heights, Ohio,

said: "It is becoming increasingly difficult for administrators to document the accelerating need of funds for a discipline that affects so few."¹ Besides attempting to solve the attrition problem, Lawson also suggested that "we turn and focus our attention on that large, untouched group — the majority of students which does not study a foreign language. There must be new ways to gain their interest, to hold it, and to provide for the wide range of aptitudes and abilities in their group."²

There are indeed many available avenues which might help alleviate attrition and attract the untouched student population. Most of them tend to fall into two general categories: program diversification and public awareness. Basically, we must broaden our curricular horizons to entice greater numbers to continue and attract more to begin; at the same time we must also make our potential students and the public at large aware of the importance of foreign language study and the various curricular options available to them.

A good place to begin program diversification is at the upper levels of foreign language instruction in the secondary school curriculum. Several considerations support this recommendation:

1. After two years of foreign language study, students have gained a command of basic vocabulary and grammatical structures. This provides a dependable preparation for the pursuit of different avenues in the foreign language field.
2. It is at the end of Level II that the greatest degree of dropout occurs and the upper level courses are usually the ones that are most often dropped or combined together in one class.
3. At this point in the curriculum students are often attracted to semester or even shorter elective courses in other academic areas. Many potential advanced level students do not enroll in a foreign language class simply because they are forced to take a full year or none at all.

Some of the schools which have attempted upper-level curricular diversification have done so via the offering of mini-courses. At Waukesha Central and South High Schools in Waukesha, Wisconsin, the staff has added a mini-course option to its French and Spanish advanced level offerings. The sequence consists of four mini-courses per semester and it is open to all students who have successfully completed Level II. Sample topics include trip planning, music, everyday culture, history, reading newspapers and magazines, food

1. Lawson, John H. "Should Foreign Language Be Eliminated From the Curriculum?" in Strasheim, Lorraine A. (ed.), *Foreign Language in a New Apprenticeship for Living*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Language Program, 1971, p. 10.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

and cooking, and sports. The addition of this option has significantly reduced attrition at the end of Level II and brought about a 33% rise in enrollment in both French and Spanish upper level courses. Just as important, it might even be partially responsible for an enrollment increase in beginning and intermediate courses.

A Bloomington South High School in Indiana, the advanced-level Spanish curriculum consists of 14 mini-courses, which are combined in various ways to make up eight different semester series of four mini-courses each. In the first semester, the student selects one particular series; during the second semester he may select another complete series or make up one of his own choosing. The courses vary in length from two to six weeks. Enrollment in upper-level Spanish classes has increased every year since the inception of mini-courses even though the total school population has gone down as a result of a new high school and redistricting.

If mini-courses are not possible in your particular situation, you might want to consider the possibility of diversified semester offerings. Instead of scheduling two year-long sections of Spanish III classes, you might give students a choice of "Spanish for Reading" or "Spanish for Conversation" during the first semester and "Everyday Spanish Culture" or "Business Spanish" during the second semester. I recently read of a school where the Spanish and Business Education departments were cooperating to offer an "Office Skills" course in Spanish.

Although it might be easiest to diversify the curriculum at the advanced-level of instruction, this does not exclude the possibility of options at the beginning and intermediate stages. At Live Oak High School in Morgan Hill, California the German program is totally individualized and includes more than 40 courses at five levels of instruction. All courses are available every period of the day. At the beginning level students may select one of five options: (1) a one semester introductory course for students wishing to sample German, (2) a beginning German course covering the four skills and geared toward high school credit, (3) a beginning course geared toward college entrance, (4) a course focusing on conversational German, and (5) a course emphasizing the listening and reading skills.

At the university level of instruction we already have diversity in advanced course offerings but unfortunately most of it is restricted to the literary arena. We need more culture courses, more language oriented courses, and some special courses designed for future elementary and secondary teachers such as "adolescent literature" or "French literature as found in high school textbooks." Would you believe that at one major university, Spanish majors are not allowed to count culture courses taught in Spanish as credit toward their major?

Institutions of higher learning should continue in earnest their attempts to diversify curricular options at the beginning and intermediate levels of instruction. Daymond Turner of the University of North Carolina at Charlotte says that "today, more than ever, our survival as a profession depends on our ability to develop offerings that will be attractive to non-majors"³ At a national meeting not long ago, I suggested to a university department chairman the possibility of offering "French, German or Spanish for Travel" as beginning language courses. His reply to me was "For credit?" I hope that we have progressed beyond that stage and will consider implementing courses which are attractive to non-majors. An excellent example of such a course appears in the Fall 1973 issue of *American Foreign Language Teacher*. The article entitled "Reading for Information" and written by Wilga Rivers outlines a course designed to teach students to extract information from texts with only a recognition knowledge of basic grammar and vocabulary.

Other avenues open to college and university foreign language programs include cooperative ventures with the School of Business and/or the Department of Elementary Education. At a time when unemployment is a problem in this country, we should convince Schools of Business and businessmen everywhere that we can help train American personnel to assume positions in American-owned companies abroad instead of these companies having to hire natives. Probably the largest vacancy of jobs in the entire world today is in Germany. Why? Partially because Germany has been strong in teaching foreign languages, and with their products they have also exported personnel to take care of the plants, factories and agencies throughout the rest of the world. Less than two years ago Russia sent to Chile 20,000 technicians in copper industry and administration of such businesses, speaking Chilean-Spanish as if they had been born in Chile. Similarly, Japan also exports foreign speaking workers and administrators to its plants all over the world. Not too long ago the Business School at Indiana University sent an evaluation questionnaire to its MBA and BS in Business degree holders. There existed two salient criticisms: (1) no exposure to foreign languages (2) because of lack of language, they had never lived abroad, something which was often a requirement for international jobs. Cooperation with elementary education departments might consist of identifying or designing a set of Spanish courses tailored to elementary education majors preparing to teach in Latino or other bilingual-bicultural communities.

This leads us directly to that often discussed education topic today: career education. Put in its proper perspective, career

3. Turner, Daymond. "The Language Laboratory: Hardware for Hard Times" in Bostick and Hutchinson (eds.), *Dimension: Language '72*. New York: ACTFL, 1973.

education offers yet another viable alternative to the foreign language teaching profession. F. LeRoy Walser of the U. S. Office of Education defines career education in the September 1973 issue of *Accent on ACTFL*.

"Career education is a broad concept which stresses that all educators must become sensitive to student career needs in structuring their curriculum offerings and that presumably all school programs will assist the student to develop the necessary skills to perform in the career he selects.⁴

Some people may disagree with the concept of career education because they believe that it is impossible in our rapid-changing society to prepare students for any one specific job. Even if we were to accept this argument, it should matter little to foreign language teachers because the kind of skill which we can give to our students is applicable to a myriad of employment opportunities, even some which do not yet exist.

Whether or not we agree with career education, all of us should begin to make students at every level of foreign language instruction aware of careers that either require or would be enhanced by foreign language skills. This could be accomplished by planning a career day, having career oriented materials available to students or permitting students to visit with individuals holding language oriented positions. The obligation to make students aware of all sorts of career options lies not only with high school teachers but with university professors as well. We need to get away from encouraging our best students to enroll in graduate programs while recommending that the rest become elementary and secondary school teachers. University language departments should have programs which permit both existing and potential majors to explore career opportunities. Such programs might include visiting graduate level courses, being a guest at a department meeting, visiting secondary school language classes, exploring non-teaching careers, and most important having access to a sincere counselor, one who will do more than sign the next semester's course cards.

Other avenues in the career education arena include the offering of career oriented semester or mini-courses and the use of career models in classroom simulation. At the culture workshop at Indiana University last summer, one of the French participants developed a packet to teach French shorthand. As concerns classroom simulation of actual events in which the foreign language is used, the teacher might suggest that some of them focus on definite career possibilities such as a social worker, an airline employee, an American car

4. Walser, F. LeRoy, "Career Education Holds FL Challenge." *Accent on ACTFL*, Vol. IV, No. 1 (September 1973), p. 8.

salesman in Europe, or an American Express employee in Latin America.

Up to now we have mentioned several alternatives to foreign language programming. The remaining problem, of course, is to determine which alternative to select. Having witnessed educational fads come and go and having been embroiled in methodological battles, it now appears clear to the profession that there is no one single element which will solve all our problems. Speaking to the Michigan Foreign Language Association recently, Lorraine A. Strasheim said:

"We can no longer make a single professional promise to adopt a single professional practice -- whether that promise be the so-called "standard" sequence, a methodological approach, or even a rationale. We cannot ever put all of our professional "eggs" in one basket again. That professional promise we make and the professional practices we adopt must be made to the people we serve on a local level. That promise may be individualized pacing programs in some schools, bilingual programs in some, or mini-course curricula, or total immersion programs, self-contained foreign language experiences or exploratory courses; in some schools, it may take the form of career education or interdisciplinary programs: whatever promise we make today, however, must be in the form of a working hypothesis, with provision for change built in -- and our practices must be contemporary measures -- not commandments for all time. Our programs must be as diversified as the student populations and the individual students we serve."⁵

If we are to cater to the needs of local communities, then we must go to the students, parents and public at large in order to assess what these needs are. Teachers considering diversifying upper level curricular offerings can find an excellent student questionnaire in the appendix of *The Extended Foreign Language Sequence*, a Minnesota Department of Education publication, available from ERIC (Order No. EDO47-586). The October 1973 issue of *Foreign Language Annals* contains two important articles dealing with assessment of needs. John L. Walker deals with "The Opinions of University Students About Language Teaching" and Anthony Papalia writes about the use of "Students, Parents, and Teachers as Data Sources for Determining FL Instructional Goals." It should be mentioned that in both these articles, the overwhelming goal of the population queried is to speak and understand the foreign language.

5. Strasheim, Lorraine A. "Promises, Problems, Practices." Unpublished speech presented to the Michigan Foreign Language Association, October 25, 1973.

This past week, a student in my graduate methods class reported the results of a similar questionnaire which she administered to 350 foreign language students in Columbus, Indiana. She too found that communication was the primary goal of the majority of students. In order to demonstrate the diversity of student opinion, I would like to quote a few of the student comments found in this questionnaire:

Question: What do you hope to obtain from foreign language learning?

Answer: Say things my mom won't understand.

* * * * *

Question: Why did you take the language you are taking?

- Answers: 1. I have braces and can't roll my R's.
2. Because they kicked me out of Spanish.

* * * * *

Question: Do you think foreign language learning is important? Why or why not?

- Answers: 1. Depends on what you plan to do when you get older. I doubt if a garbage man needs it to collect garbage but a U. N. delegate might.
2. Yes. Most people in other countries know English, so for them I am learning German.
3. No, not much use for boys to take it. I don't plan to be a Spanish teacher.
4. Yes, the French people might take over some day and I want to be able to talk to them.
5. No, the real French speaking people don't talk the way we do in class anyway.

Besides program diversity, the second general area synonymous with "lessening attrition" and "tapping the untouched population" is public awareness. We need to make our present students thrilled about their foreign language experience so that they will go out and advertise the program. We need to make the non-language students and the administration aware of our offerings and articles. We need to make our program and its products visible to the public at large.

In order to accomplish the above, we need not reinvent the wheel. Recent and soon to be published professional literature contain several good examples of publicity items and events. In the Fall issue of *American Foreign Language Teacher*, James Becker describes in detail the foreign language festival held at the Malcolm Price Laboratory School in Cedar Falls, Iowa. Twelve hundred language students from 54 schools throughout Iowa were in attendance. He lists 39 different activities in which students could participate. These included sessions on "How to Chew Someone Out

in French, German, Latin, Spanish, etc.," a stamp market, a lecture on wines, cheese testing, a game center, mini-courses in Persian, Chinese and Swedish, a soccer game, and countless others. Many other schools and universities have sponsored similar festivals. The February 1974 issue of *Accent on ACTFL* will include pictures and descriptions of at least four of these.

In addition to events aimed at the existing foreign language student population, we also need activities which involve the public at large. In the new book *Student Motivation and the Foreign Language Teacher*, the Proceedings of the 1973 Central States Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, Gertrude Meyer of Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, Public Schools writes about their immensely successful festival which attracted over four thousand people from Wauwatosa and surrounding communities. She discusses accountability and the local citizenry, and makes practical suggestions for setting up a foreign language festival. Included are a sample letter to parents, the festival floor plan, a sample program, and a price list of items for sale. In her evaluation she discusses financial results, motivational impact upon students, public relations value to the community, and improved *esprit de corps* among staff members.

In the same publication, a chapter by Constance Knop entitled "Gaining Better Student Support for the Foreign Language Program" proposes both blatant and informational advertising of foreign language programs. She suggests contacts with feeder schools and institutions of higher learning, liaison with guidance counselors, orientation letters and student oriented curriculum guides.

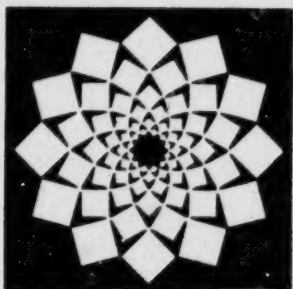
In Hackensack, New Jersey, the staff offers foreign language courses to the police department and to fellow teachers of other subjects. They act as interpreters for the county court and translate documents for various local agencies. They maintain a good relationship with the media and collect videotaped interviews with individuals from the business world. They work closely with surrounding universities, help train future teachers and maintain open communication with other school systems. In short, they work at it.

Another exciting professional development took place last year in Fort Meyers, Florida, and is described in the September 1973 issue of *Accent on ACTFL*. Mary Johnson, Lee County FL Consultant, and her staff prepared a synchronized tape-slide program entitled "The World Outside our Skin" for presentation to administrators, supervisors, and curriculum directors at an ASCD meeting. Enticed by the title of the presentation and the lack of knowledge that it dealt with foreign languages, they attended *en masse*. The program portrayed many changes in foreign language study which they had

not realized were already a reality. So successful was the presentation that the local NBC affiliate has asked the Lee County teachers to adapt the program for a half-hour telecast.

Job security *is* a serious problem in our profession today, but there are too many innovative and dedicated teachers in our ranks to think that the problem will not be solved. In fact the recognition and solution to the problem will only help make us an even more united profession which offers an even larger selection of curricular options to an even larger, more diverse and more excited student population. The world is indeed outside our skin and it awaits our actions.

**THE BULLETIN OF THE
ILLINOIS FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS
ASSOCIATION**



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*Published at Macomb, Illinois, by the
Department of Foreign Languages, Western Illinois University.*

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Published twice a year in May and October, the *Bulletin of the Illinois Foreign Language Teachers' Association* is the official journal of that organization and is produced in cooperation with the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages, the Modern Language Association, and the Office of the Illinois Superintendent of Public Instruction. Subscription to the Bulletin is included in the membership to the Illinois Foreign Language Teachers Association. The membership fee is currently \$3.00 per year.

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